

NARRATOR: Nielsen, A. Glen "Ace"

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: April 12, 2001

LOCATION: Eagle, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter

Summary

000	Introduction.
010	Nielsen, who goes by the nickname "Ace," gave details of his early life, including where he grew up and where he went to school. He talked about where he was when he heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.
030	After the United States became involved in World War II, Nielsen enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Nielsen detailed the various stops inside the United States where he trained as a Navy pilot. Nielsen trained at numerous locations because the Navy kept adding phases onto flight training. He also mentioned the various aspects of training, including what planes he flew.
075	With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen explained what it meant to "get your wings." He also clarified some issues about his training locales.
085	Nielsen explained how he received his nickname, "Ace." His fellow smokejumpers embellished his naval flying record to make him more impressive to some women at a bar in Missoula, Montana. He continued to talk about how he became involved in smokejumping; he felt privileged to fight fires in the Idaho wilderness.
120	When Nielsen mustered out of the Navy, he was looking for something to do before returning to college. Some friends told him about smokejumping, so he decided to travel up to McCall to become a jumper. He offered an overview of what he did when he arrived at the smokejumper camp, including traveling to Missoula to train and training to be physically fit to battle blazes. Nielsen said he did not remember jogging as an aspect of physical training, but his work on the family farm and his time in the military helped keep him fit before he became a smokejumper.
185	In addition to physical training, Nielsen discussed some aspects of mental training or training specific to fighting fires, such as digging a fire line, and fighting a set fire. He continued to talk about how they prepared to jump out of an airplane.

215 Before the first practice jump, according to Nielsen, he wrote a letter to his mother. Nielsen felt that fact showed the apprehension he felt. With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen continued to discuss the practice jump and his first fire jump, which was a jump into fog, not a fire. He said the pack out was harder than fighting that "fire." He also mentioned the various ways a smokejumping crew could pack out from a fire, including using horses, mules, or their feet.

295 Nielsen claimed he could not describe specific fires very well. He talked about how he and the others felt about jumping onto a fire. Smokejumpers could land in trees instead of the ground. Nielsen talked about the training involved in landing in trees. He also described landing in trees during fire jumps; he said that other smokejumpers claimed that he steered towards trees.

375 Nielsen talked about one particular type of parachute—an Eagle chute—that he used on some jumps. Nielsen worked in the parachute loft, so he talked about packing parachutes, including the Eagle and the other parachutes. He told a story about landing in a tree in a large open meadow.

435 Nielsen has met with other former smokejumpers on a regular basis. He began talking about why he created these meetings.

440 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Nielsen knew many former smokejumpers in Boise. He liked seeing them in the city, so he decided to create a formal meeting date and time. He claimed that they have met for the last seven years. He described the various issues that the former smokejumpers discussed. He also mentioned that he did not steer the conversations toward religion or politics. He said certain people (although he did not mention names) make the meetings great, because they tell a good story.

040 During the first meeting, the jumpers that served at McCall in the late 1940s mainly attended. He talked about how more jumpers from the 1950s and 1960s have begun to meet. He furnished his opinions about why smokejumpers stayed in touch with each other. He said that he also has stayed in touch with the people who trained with him during World War II.

075 With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen talked about the number of ex-military men that jumped in the late 1940s. He also mentioned the jumpers that did not serve in the war, because they were too young. He

said that he did not see any tensions between the veterans and non-veterans.

- 110 During his years as a smokejumper, most people worked at it during the summer only. He explained what he did during the fall, winter, and spring. He attended school at the University of Idaho, so he thought smokejumping gave him a great summer opportunity. Nielsen felt that most jumpers during his time did not wish to smokejump as a full-time career; he did not want to smokejump full-time. He did regret not being able to fly the airplanes (which were the same airplanes that Nielsen trained on during World War II) that dropped retardant on the forest fires.
- 160 Nielsen provided his remembrances of a fire jump from the time before the fire bell rang through fighting the fire. He talked about eating a big breakfast before the sun rose, and he mentioned how some jumpers vomited in the airplane before the jump. He described the protocols of jumping from the plane, landing, and retrieving the parachutes and equipment. He then described digging a fire line and throwing dirt on the hot spots of the fire.
- 230 With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen continued to discuss fighting fire by describing the equipment they used to contain a fire.
- 275 During Nielsen's time smokejumpers stayed on small fires until the blazes were contained. He talked about what smokejumpers did to mop up a fire, and he described what procedures jumpers followed when they returned to the McCall base.
- 320 When he was not fighting fire, Nielsen worked in the parachute loft as a rigger. He also mentioned what other smokejumpers did when they were not fighting a fire.
- 340 Nielsen talked about the food they ate not only at camp but also on a fire. Nielsen said they ate well at camp; he never complained about the food prepared by the cooks. He mentioned the food, including canned food and coffee that jumpers brought to the fire.
- 385 Nielsen surmised that his pilot training led to his non-fire work in the parachute loft. He talked about himself and Wayne Webb. They both worked in the parachute loft, and Webb became one of the prominent smokejumpers in its history. Nielsen claimed that he talked Webb into staying with smokejumping and working in the parachute loft.
- 435 **END OF SIDE TWO**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Boise Junior College
Boise, Idaho
Glenview, Illinois
Kuna, Idaho
McCall, Idaho
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Missoula, Montana
Nampa, Idaho
Opelika, Florida
Oxnard, California
Payette Lake (Idaho)
Payette River (Idaho)
Pensacola, Florida
Purdue University (Indiana)
Salmon River (Idaho)
Salmon, Idaho
United States Navy
University of Idaho
Webb, Wayne

NARRATOR: Nielsen, A. Glen "Ace"

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves and Matt Walker

DATE: May 2, 2001

LOCATION: Eagle, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter

Summary

- | | |
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| 000 | Introduction |
| 010 | Nielsen explains what a rigger is. Talks about working with Wayne Webb and John Ferguson. He would check the chutes as a rigger making sure they were not ripped. Then they would fold and pack the chutes. Nielsen explains that the winter is when they do all the major repairs to damaged chutes. |
| 047 | Nielsen claims that there were four main buildings: the barracks, parachute loft, fire cache (food rations), and the kitchen, all within fifty yards of each other. There was also a location up on the hill for married couples. |
| 073 | For people around Nielsen's age at that time, McCall was viewed as a place to have a good time on Saturday night; it was a resort town. You had to drive through town to get to the airport from the base. |
| 092 | The places where smokejumpers hung out in the evenings or after work were the Foresters' Club, Dog House, maybe the Yacht Club, and some other popular place by the lake that no longer exists. They served dinner at the mess hall after they got off work at five. They would never go into town before having dinner. |
| 116 | The smokejumpers started a little softball team the first year "Ace" was at the McCall base; the second year they got some of the McCall town players and had a good team. That turned into a baseball team instead of a softball team. In 1948 they had a real good team. Nielsen participated in as much baseball as he could. The fellows that worked in the winter took place in many hunting trips. Some of the guys would fish on fires, whenever time would allow them to. Other recreational sports the smokejumpers did were swimming in the lake and taking trips to friend's cabins around the lake. |
| 173 | Some of the places where Nielsen was familiar with jumping were Chamberlain Basin, the Sawtooths above Stanley Basin, fires on both sides of the Snake River, the city of Salmon, and Mackey Bar on the mouth of the south fork. |

- 197 Salmon City and McCall were very similar. Nielsen can only remember one place they hung out at in Salmon that was on the main street; he couldn't recall its name.
- 219 Nielsen talks about a fire he was on around Montana, a fire that had many other people working on it before his arrival. They would normally try to send smokejumpers into an area that would be hard for the ground troops to get to, something that might be spreading. Smokejumpers were assigned to a certain section of the fire and did a lot of trenching.
- 252 "Ace" talks about a fire on the Middle Fork of the Salmon in which he and his partner were on, where they swam the across the Middle Fork of the Salmon River and hit Stoddard Trail that ran all the way up the west side of the Middle Fork of the Salmon to the mouth of the middle fork. This is where he and his partner met up with the shuttle trucks.
- 288 Nielsen talks about jumping with Dave Schas on Sheep Mountain. Goat Mountain and Tumble Creek were the other two fires they were on together. Nielsen talks about jumping on Owl Creek, flying out of Salmon to McCall, putting their jump chutes right back on, flying out to the Salmon, jumping on the big Tumble Creek fire, and the Goat Mountain fire in one day with smokejumper David Schas.
- 326 Looking at a picture of Glen Nielsen ("Ace"), George Schrieber ("Seeds"), Wayne Webb, and Dave Schas. Dave and "Ace" jumped on the Goat Mountain fire and the other two fires on Tumble Creek. This is a picture of the four men in front of the airplane hanger in McCall. There is also a picture of where "Ace" got hung up in a tree on the Goat Mountain fire. "Ace" said, "Maybe he landed like that on purpose because he didn't want to hurt himself."
- 341 "Ace" only said he jumped on two fires in Hells Canyon. He jumped on a fire on the Idaho side and there were already Mexican ground troops working on the fire. "Ace" had a bad landing on this jump and hurt all over. He also jumped on a fire on the Oregon side in maybe 1947.
- 380 "Ace" was jumping on the Snake River before the dams were put in and said, "It was not a river that he felt like swimming across as much as the Salmon."
- 404 The smoke jumpers didn't have any tools on them when they landed. The planes would drop the materials that you needed. The tools were a Pulaski, shovel, and on rare occasions, a crosscut saw. The Pulaski and shovel were the tools you used the most.

- 443 One jumper got killed the first year "Ace" jumped. They may have been cutting down a tree with a crosscut saw when the top of the tree fell, hit the jumper in the head, and killed him. Lester Lycklama was his name. "Ace" was not on that fire.
- 447 The Big Bar Fire on the Snake River had a dozen people on it maybe. "Ace", Mansisidor, Wilde, Aguirre, Brewer, Burton, Yergenson, and so on. They thought they had the fire under control but the fire crossed a ravine right at the bottom of the area. "Ace" was not proud of this because the fire crossed where the troops should have been. This was a big fire with Mexican ground crews. The smokejumpers were in the area of the fire that was hard to get too.
- 488 "Ace" thought he should have flown one of the retardant planes after he quit smoke jumping. He went back to dairy farming instead. He stated, "I wished I would have quit farming and flew retardant planes instead."
- 500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 000 At the time he didn't do it because he didn't know the forest service was using the TBM that he flew in the Navy. The same airplanes the forest service used to drop borate or fire retardant. The types of planes that "Ace" flew while training to be a pilot at the airport through Purdue University were bi-planes that were bigger than what most cadets were learning to fly. He flew the Waco UPF-7, which had 220 horsepower. He felt he had a leg up on the other cadets because of its power.
- 025 The War Training Service is where the cadets spent three months before learning to fly. "Ace" went to Minneapolis, Minnesota and flew the N2-S (Boeing Stearman). In basic training he went to Pensacola Florida and flew the Voltee, a plane with a sliding canapé and 450 horsepower engine. He then flew SNJs, what the Army called AT-6's. He had a total of over 100 hours in the SNJ.
- 060 The Douglas Dauntless was a dive-bomber that he used and trained in for a few weeks. Nielsen describes trying to loose the other planes as a fun thing to do. Opelika, near Miami, Florida is where he went next and learned to fly the Grumman, the TBM Torpedo Bomber.
- 080 The Devil's Triangle story happened in Opelika five months after Nielsen left. The story was that five TBM bombers disappeared in the triangle and were never recovered.
- 085 "Ace" went from Miami to Glenview, Illinois on lake Michigan. This is where he learned how to land on aircraft carriers. He talks about some

officers having to land on a carrier for their first time. Nielsen went on to North Island in San Diego and was assigned to Oxnard (Auxiliary Naval Station). He was placed in a pool for operational training where he learned to fly the SP2-C (Hell Diver), a warplane used during World War II.

140 With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen described how they extended the pilot training while he served. He explained how he felt about this occurrence. He said the extra training prepared them better for aerial warfare.

165 Nielsen stopped smokejumping in 1948. He continued to talk about his World War II experience by stating which aircraft he enjoyed flying the most, the TBM Torpedo Bomber.

185 Nielsen offered his opinions of the Mann Gulch fire in Montana in 1949. He had stopped jumping by that time, but he read the accounts in the newspaper and in *Life* magazine. He said that the tragedy could have happened to them during his time smokejumping. He talked about how the coffee meeting discussed the Mann Gulch and Storm King fires, and they discussed other smokejumping events.

220 During the early 1980s, women joined the smokejumpers. Nielsen furnished his opinions about female jumpers. He also talked about how some people in the coffee club disagree about the worthiness of female smokejumpers.

250 Nielsen described the differences and similarities between smokejumping and military training. He said during his time in the military and with the smokejumpers he was a good physical shape, mainly because of his age.

280 With prompting from the interviewer, Nielsen talked about the age of people entering smokejumping. During his time World War II veterans joined the smokejumpers; they were in their early to mid-20s.

305 Smokejumping, according to Nielsen, has served as a focal point in his life. He continued to describe how smokejumpers during his day attacked fires as soon as the lightning struck. He said that today's policy should reflect their work in the 1940s, meaning they should attack all fires early.

350 During his three years as a jumper, Nielsen did fight fire at night. He offered his opinions about battling blazes with only the light of the fire.

375 Nielsen described his relationship with the backcountry pilots who flew smokejumpers. He did say that one pilot let him fly the plane for a few minutes during a smokejump. He knew the pilots were competent, so he did not worry about them; he just worried about jumping.

400 **END OF SIDE TWO**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Big Bar fire (Idaho)
Chamberlain Basin (Idaho)
Dog House (McCall, Idaho)
Ferguson, John
Foresters' Club (McCall, Idaho)
Glenview, Illinois
Goat Mountain fire (Idaho)
Hells Canyon
Mackay Bar (Idaho)
Mann Gulch fire (1949, Montana)
McCall, Idaho
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Opelika, Florida
Oxnard, California
Pensacola, Florida
Purdue University (Indiana)
Roaring Creek fire (Idaho)
Salmon, Idaho
San Diego, California
Schas, David
Snake River
Stoddard Trail (Idaho)
Storm King fire (1994, Colorado)
Tumble Creek fire (Idaho)
Webb, Wayne